How Diabetes Affects Your Oral Health | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/how-does-diabetes-affect-your-oral-health/

Details:

Diabetes can affect your mouth in several ways. When blood glucose levels stay high, the risk of gum disease (periodontal disease), dry mouth, tooth decay, oral thrush and changes in taste can rise. The link also works both ways, because gum disease can make blood glucose harder to control. At Core Dental we recommend regular dental visits if you have diabetes, and we encourage you to tell us about your diagnosis and medicines.

Why does diabetes increase the risk of gum disease?

Consistently high blood glucose levels increase the risk of developing severe gum disease. Gum disease is an infection of the structures that support your teeth, including the gums and bone. It can cause inflammation, bleeding, gum recession, bone loss and eventually loose or mobile teeth.

Early signs include red, swollen or bleeding gums, bad breath and gums that pull away from the teeth. Because gum disease can be painless in its early stages, regular check-ups are a good way to catch it. Read more in why people suffer from gum disease and what treatment of gum disease involves .

Is the link between diabetes and gum disease one-way?

No. The relationship runs in both directions. Poor gum health can make it more difficult to control blood glucose, so looking after your gums may help support your diabetes management, and the reverse is also true. Your doctor remains the right person to manage your diabetes, and we work alongside them by looking after your mouth.

How does diabetes cause dry mouth and tooth decay?

Diabetes can reduce the flow of saliva and lead to a dry mouth. This salivary gland dysfunction may be linked to sialadenosis, a swelling of the salivary glands. Saliva protects the teeth against decay, so less saliva raises the risk of decay and oral thrush.

Gum disease can also lead to gum recession, which exposes the root of the tooth. The root is not covered by protective enamel, so it is more prone to decay. A high-sugar diet is a risk factor for poor diabetes control and for decay too, so managing blood glucose levels also helps protect your teeth.

Why is oral thrush more common when diabetes is poorly controlled?

Oral thrush (oral candidiasis) is a fungal infection of the mouth. Poorly controlled diabetes can raise the risk in three ways: reduced saliva means fungi are not flushed away as well, the immune system may be less able to clear the fungi, and raised glucose levels in saliva can feed fungal growth. Signs can include white patches, soreness or a change in taste. If you notice these, see your dentist or doctor.

What can you do to protect your oral health with diabetes?

Keep blood glucose levels in the healthy range set with your doctor, including limiting high-sugar foods and drinks.

Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and clean between your teeth every night.

Sip water regularly and chew sugar-free gum to help with a dry mouth.

If you wear dentures, clean them every night and leave them out to dry overnight.

Do not smoke. Smoking adds to the risk of gum disease. See how smoking affects your oral health .

Visit your dentist regularly. Your dentist will tell you how often to come based on your oral health risk.

What should you tell your dentist if you have diabetes?

Tell us at booking and at each visit about your diabetes type, your recent blood glucose readings or HbA1c if you know them, your medicines and any recent changes. Mention any dry mouth, bleeding gums, slow healing or mouth soreness. This helps our dentists plan treatment safely. For some procedures we may suggest booking at a time of day that suits your meals and medicines, or checking with your doctor first.

How can we help?

Our dentists and hygienists can examine your gums and teeth, clean away plaque and calculus, treat gum disease and decay and show you how to care for your mouth at home. We give you a written treatment plan with fees before treatment starts, and offer interest-free payment plans. Call 13 13 16 or book online at any of our nine clinics.

Sources

This article draws on general information from Dental Health Services Victoria, Diabetes Australia, Therapeutic Guidelines (Oral and Dental) and published reviews of diabetes and oral health. This article is general in nature and is not a substitute for advice from your doctor or dentist.

Further detail from Core Dental

The following points are drawn from Core Dental's own published material on this topic. They are included here for completeness, and anything that applies to your own treatment should be confirmed with your clinician.

While the relationship between diabetes and oral health may often be looked over, it is important to maintain good control of your blood sugar to prevent complications occurring within your mouth. Blood-glucose levels need to be maintained within a healthy range – this can be achieved through avoiding high-sugar diet. If dentures are used, they should be cleaned nightly and left to dry overnight. The importance of twice-a-day brushing, cleaning in between teeth every night, and regularly visiting the dentist is paramount for the diabetic patient who is at higher risk of oral health issues.

The five problems, and the one lever that affects all of them

Diabetes and oral health are usually discussed in general terms. The published advice names five specific problems and one variable that runs through every one of them.

The five. The Victorian Department of Health introduces them as "the most common oral health problems affecting people with diabetes", and lists "periodontal (gum) disease", "tooth decay", "oral thrush fungal infections, such as thrush (also known as candidiasis)", "taste disturbances" and "dry mouth due to low saliva levels".

The variable. "Diabetes can lead to multiple complications in the mouth. These complications can increase in severity when a person with diabetes has poor control of their blood glucose levels. This is because they have lowered resistance to infection and may not heal as easily."

Lowered resistance to infection, and slower healing. That is the mechanism behind all five, and it is why glucose control is the lever rather than any dental product.

On gum disease. "Gum disease is more common and more severe in people with suboptimal blood glucose levels. This is because they generally have lower resistance to infection and reduced healing capacity." And the Department's description of what it does: "The inflammation slowly destroys the bone surrounding and supporting your teeth. This bone holds your teeth into your jawbone and allows you to chew comfortably."

And the relationship runs both ways. "It is important to look after your oral health and control your blood glucose levels to prevent gum disease. Treating gum disease may also help to improve blood glucose levels in people living with diabetes. In general, people with blood glucose levels in the target range respond very well to dental treatment."

Treating gum disease may also help to improve blood glucose levels — that is the Department's own wording, and we are not going to strengthen it.

On decay, the mechanism is specific. "With increased blood glucose levels, people living with diabetes may have more glucose in their saliva and very dry mouths. These conditions allow dental plaque to build up on teeth, which can lead to tooth decay and cavities."

And the site is distinctive: "Tooth decay can occur more easily on the root of the tooth. This area is usually covered by the gums, however, in people with periodontitis (gum disease), the shrinking gums may expose the tooth root. Shrinking gums may also result in larger gaps between teeth which trap food and plaque."

On oral thrush. "Oral thrush (candidiasis) is a fungal infection occurring in or around the mouth. It is caused by an overgrowth of the yeast, Candida albicans, which lives in the mouth." The diabetes-related conditions that encourage it are "high glucose in saliva, lowered resistance to infection and dry mouth (low saliva levels)". Its signs: "white patches of plaque on soft tissues in the mouth, such as the tongue. The white patch can often be wiped off and will leave behind red areas that may bleed slightly." Treatment: "Good mouth hygiene and blood glucose levels in the target range can help to treat oral thrush. Your dentist can treat this condition by prescribing antifungal medications if needed."

On altered taste, the Department is honest about not knowing. "The ability to taste foods and drinks can be affected in people with diabetes. The underlying cause for this is not clear."

How common diabetes is. "Diabetes is a common condition in Australia, affecting around 1.8 million people (around 7% of the population)."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Diabetes and oral health, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 29 October 2025). Accessed 6 November 2026.

Two myths the Department names, and the signs to act on

The published advice goes out of its way to correct two beliefs, and one of them is the reason people put up with a symptom that matters.

Myth one. "Many people think that gum disease is an unavoidable part of diabetes, but this is not true. Good oral hygiene and well-controlled blood glucose levels greatly reduce your risk."

Not unavoidable. That is the Department's own correction, and it matters because resignation is what stops people acting.

Myth two. "Another common myth is that dry mouth is harmless. In fact, dry mouth increases the risk of tooth decay and oral infections, so it's important to get support if you notice it."

The gum disease signs to report immediately. "Please see your dentist immediately if you notice any signs and symptoms of gum disease, including: red, swollen, tender or bleeding gums; a persistent discharge (pus) coming from the gums; gums that are loose and pull away from the teeth; a bad taste or bad breath; loose teeth - this can change the 'feel' of your bite when your teeth are placed together or may make dentures fit differently; spaces opening up between your teeth."

Two of those are unusual and worth noting: a change in how your bite feels, or how a denture fits, and spaces opening up between teeth.

And a reason to pay attention even before a diagnosis. "The first signs and symptoms of diabetes can occur in the mouth, so paying attention to your oral health and speaking to your doctor or dental practitioner about any changes can also lead to earlier diagnosis and treatment."

The daily routine, in the Department's own words. "Dental plaque can be removed by cleaning your teeth and gums twice daily with a toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Be gentle when brushing over the gums where they meet the teeth as bushing them too hard can cause some gum loss. Use interdental cleaners or dental floss daily to clean between your teeth. Taking good care of your teeth prevents cavities and gum disease."

Smoking makes it worse, and quitting helps measurably. "Smoking increases the risk of developing gum disease or the disease worsening for all people, whether they have diabetes or not. Quitting smoking can help to prevent the development of gum disease and improve healing for people having treatment for gum disease."

The Department points to Quitline for help, and its separate smoking advice notes that people who smoke or vape "are more likely to get infections and do not heal as well as non-smokers/non-vapers".

How often to be seen. "Visit your dentist every 6 to 12 months for advice about how to keep your teeth and gums healthy." Its gum disease page adds the lever for diabetes specifically: "For people with diabetes, keeping blood sugar levels well-controlled will help to reduce the risk of gum disease."

One thing worth raising at an implant or surgery consultation. Diabetes is named among the groups at greater risk of an implant not integrating: "People who are at a greater risk include those who: smoke; have diabetes; have some bone conditions such as osteoporosis; are immune compromised."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Diabetes and oral health, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 29 October 2025); Gum disease, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); Effects of smoking and vaping on oral health, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 24 September 2025); Cosmetic dentistry and teeth whitening, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 12 December 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Can diabetes cause bleeding gums?

Yes, bleeding gums can be an early sign of gum disease, which is more likely when blood glucose is high. See your dentist for an examination rather than waiting for it to settle.

Should I tell my dentist I have diabetes?

Yes. It helps us plan your care, advise on gum health and decide when and how to schedule treatment. Tell us about your medicines too.

Does diabetes make teeth fall out?

Diabetes does not directly make teeth fall out, but severe gum disease can cause bone loss and loose teeth. Good blood glucose control and regular dental care help protect your teeth.

What helps a dry mouth caused by diabetes?

Regular sips of water, sugar-free gum and good brushing can help. Tell your dentist if dry mouth persists, because they can suggest products and check for decay.

How often should I see a dentist with diabetes?

Your dentist will advise a schedule that suits your oral health risk. Many people with diabetes benefit from regular check-ups and cleans.

Which oral problems are most common with diabetes?

Five, in the Victorian Department of Health's list: "periodontal (gum) disease", "tooth decay", "oral thrush fungal infections, such as thrush (also known as candidiasis)", "taste disturbances" and "dry mouth due to low saliva levels".

Why does diabetes affect the mouth at all?

Through resistance and healing. "These complications can increase in severity when a person with diabetes has poor control of their blood glucose levels. This is because they have lowered resistance to infection and may not heal as easily."

Is gum disease inevitable if I have diabetes?

No, and the Department names this as a myth: "Many people think that gum disease is an unavoidable part of diabetes, but this is not true. Good oral hygiene and well-controlled blood glucose levels greatly reduce your risk."

Does treating my gums help my diabetes?

The Department's wording is careful, and we will not strengthen it: "Treating gum disease may also help to improve blood glucose levels in people living with diabetes. In general, people with blood glucose levels in the target range respond very well to dental treatment."

Why is decay more likely?

"With increased blood glucose levels, people living with diabetes may have more glucose in their saliva and very dry mouths. These conditions allow dental plaque to build up on teeth, which can lead to tooth decay and cavities."

Why does decay appear near the gum line?

Because the root can become exposed. "Tooth decay can occur more easily on the root of the tooth. This area is usually covered by the gums, however, in people with periodontitis (gum disease), the

shrinking gums may expose the tooth root."

Is dry mouth a serious problem?

The Department treats dismissing it as a myth: "Another common myth is that dry mouth is harmless. In fact, dry mouth increases the risk of tooth decay and oral infections, so it's important to get support if you notice it."

What is oral thrush, and how would I know?

"Oral thrush (candidiasis) is a fungal infection occurring in or around the mouth", caused by an overgrowth of Candida albicans. Signs include "white patches of plaque on soft tissues in the mouth, such as the tongue. The white patch can often be wiped off and will leave behind red areas that may bleed slightly." A dentist "can treat this condition by prescribing antifungal medications if needed".

Which symptoms mean I should be seen immediately?

"Red, swollen, tender or bleeding gums; a persistent discharge (pus) coming from the gums; gums that are loose and pull away from the teeth; a bad taste or bad breath; loose teeth - this can change the 'feel' of your bite when your teeth are placed together or may make dentures fit differently; spaces opening up between your teeth."

Can mouth changes be an early sign of diabetes?

The Department says they can: "The first signs and symptoms of diabetes can occur in the mouth, so paying attention to your oral health and speaking to your doctor or dental practitioner about any changes can also lead to earlier diagnosis and treatment."

What should my daily routine be?

"Cleaning your teeth and gums twice daily with a toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Be gentle when brushing over the gums where they meet the teeth", and "use interdental cleaners or dental floss daily to clean between your teeth".

How often should I have a check-up?

"Visit your dentist every 6 to 12 months for advice about how to keep your teeth and gums healthy."

Does smoking make it worse?

Yes, and quitting helps. "Smoking increases the risk of developing gum disease or the disease worsening for all people, whether they have diabetes or not. Quitting smoking can help to prevent the development of gum disease and improve healing for people having treatment for gum disease."

Related services and further reading

General dentistry

Dental check-ups

Dental hygiene

How to keep your gums healthy

Why do people suffer from gum disease?

What does treatment of gum disease involve?

How does smoking affect your oral health?

What causes bad breath?

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, with HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside Saturday 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

How does diabetes affect oral health?

Diabetes can raise the risk of gum disease, dry mouth, tooth decay, oral thrush and taste changes when blood glucose stays high. Core Dental dentists recommend regular check-ups and good home care.

Why does high blood glucose increase gum disease risk?

Consistently high blood glucose increases the risk of severe gum disease, an infection of the gums and bone that support teeth, causing inflammation, recession, bone loss and loose teeth. Core Dental can examine and treat gum disease.

Is the relationship between diabetes and gum disease two-way?

Yes. Poor gum health can make blood glucose harder to control, so looking after your gums may support diabetes management. Core Dental works alongside your doctor by caring for your teeth and gums.

Why does diabetes cause dry mouth?

Diabetes can reduce saliva flow, which may be linked to swelling of the salivary glands called sialadenosis. Less saliva raises decay and thrush risk. Core Dental dentists can suggest ways to manage dry mouth.

Why does diabetes make oral thrush more likely?

Poorly controlled diabetes can reduce saliva, weaken immune clearance of fungi and raise glucose levels in saliva that feed fungal growth. See Core Dental or your doctor for white patches or soreness.

What home care helps people with diabetes protect their teeth?

Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, clean between teeth nightly, sip water, chew sugar-free gum for dry mouth, clean dentures nightly and keep dental visits regular. Core Dental can tailor advice to you.

What should I tell Core Dental if I have diabetes?

Tell the Core Dental team your diabetes type, medicines, recent glucose readings if known and any dry mouth, bleeding gums or slow healing. This helps our dentists plan treatment safely.

How do I book a dental check-up at Core Dental?

Call 13 13 16 or book online through coredental.com.au for any of our nine clinics. Mention your diabetes when you book so our team can plan your visit.